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ABSTRACT

This document presents findings of a 1992 study of New York State school superintendents. Questionnaires sent by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) to 766 NYSCOSS members yielded 480 returns, a 63 percent response rate. The questionnaire examined demographics, contractual issues, retirement plans, and perceptions of education issues. Fifty-six percent of the superintendents said that they planned to retire by the year 2000, which will create a "leadership vacuum" in the state. Overall, respondents reported positive relationships with their boards of education, describing them as supportive, student-oriented, and forward-thinking. Forty-four percent said that they would choose the superintendency again, if given the chance to start anew. Although almost one-half wanted to concentrate on curriculum and instruction issues, they spent more time involved in school finance, board relations, and personnel issues. They rated the top three local issues as school finance, passage of budgets/bonds/referenda, and personnel negotiations, and the top three state issues as implementation of the New Compact for Learning, school finance, and compliance with state/federal recordkeeping requirements. Of issues on the reform agenda, they placed most value on teacher and parent involvement and outcome-based education. Seven figures are included. (LMI)

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SNAPSHOT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

A Study of School Superintendents In New York State - 1992

Sponsored by the
New York State Council of School Superintendents
and the Membership Committee

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SNAPSHOT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

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SNAPSHOT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

A STUDY OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS IN NEW YORK STATE

1992

This study was authorized by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) in the Fall, 1991. The need for the study emerged as a priority for the Membership Committee during the Council Planning Session at the Gideon Putnam, Saratoga Springs, New York, in July, 1991. The committee felt that by gathering data from the membership, the Council would develop a better understanding of the superintendency in New York State. The Council expects to conduct a membership survey every three years. This study process will give the NYSCOSS a data bank with an historic perspective.

After authorization by Executive Director Dr. James J. O'Connell, Dr. Irene Lober, Head of the Education Administration Program, SUNY New Paltz, was hired to help the Membership Committee develop the questionnaire. A recent study by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) was examined for format, style and content. The Membership Committee met twice with Dr. Lober during the Fall and Winter of 1991-1992 to develop the questionnaire. During that time the committee members field tested the instrument.

After several revisions, the questionnaire was finalized and mailed in April, 1992 to 766 NYSCOSS members, including 719 superintendents, all district superintendents, and all assistant or deputy superintendents. A total of 480 usable responses were received by the deadline of May 15, 1992. The 63 percent response rate is considered excellent and representative of the NYSCOSS population.

A sub-committee of the Membership Committee volunteered to analyze and report the results of the study by making an oral presentation at the Fall and Winter Conference in 1992-93 and completing a written report by Spring, 1993. The sub-committee was composed of William E. Whitehill, Jr., Ed.D., District Superintendent, Herkimer County BOCES; Frederick D. Volp, Ph.D., Superintendent, Oneida City Schools; and Geoffrey H. Davis, Ed.D., Superintendent, Little Falls City School District. The Regional Information Center at the Madison-Oneida BOCES, with the able assistance of Marlene Derminio, Katie Duell, and Margaret Peck, gave the sub-committee valuable expertise in tabulating and analyzing the data.

The sub-committee felt that most of the data collected was useful and provided basis for valid generalizations. Eight of the 57 questions on the survey generated confusing responses, however, and results are not reported here. The report is divided into four parts:

I. Personal - Geographical Data

II. Contractual Issues

III. Retirement

IV. Perceptions of Education Issues

Brief summary comments on the study are provided.

PART I
PERSONAL - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

As noted, the return rate for the questionnaire was 63 percent. Such a response is considered to be significant because this was a sample of the *total* membership, not a statistical sample. The breakdown of the 480 questionnaires received is reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Membership Returns

	Number	% of Total
Superintendents	436	90.80
Assistant Superintendents	11	2.30
District Superintendents	26	5.40
N.Y. City Community Superintendents	2	.04
Other	-	1.0

When this return was compared to size and type of school district, the breakdown was again considered representative. Table 2 summarizes the types of school districts responding.

Table 2
District Type

School Type	% of Total
Rural	52
Suburban	34
Small City	8
Large City	1

When comparing school size by using student enrollment figures, the returns shown in Table 3 approximated the state-wide distribution.

Table 3

District Size

Size	Returns	% of Total	Actual # of Schools in New York State
0-500	60	13	0-2000: 63% (actual); return from total 56% (sample)
501-1000	66	14	
1001-1500	98	20	2001-5000: 27% (actual); return from total 25% (sample)
1501-2000	44	9	
2001-2500	39	8	
2501-3000	37	8	
3001-3500	16	3	5000+: 10% (actual); return from total 14% (sample)
3501-4000	11	2	
4001-4500	12	3	
4501-5000	5	1	
5000+	69	14	

The mean age of superintendents responding in 1992 was 49.7 years. Ninety-two percent (92%) of our respondents are men, and 8 percent women. Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents are married, 7.1 percent are divorced and 1.7 percent never married.

The overwhelming number of superintendents, 97.3 percent, were white, with 1.3 percent black and 0.6 percent Hispanic. Forty-one percent (41%) have doctorates, and the remainder have either Master's degrees and/or Certificates of Advanced Studies.

Consideration was given as to whether superintendents tended to move up from *within* the district to the superintendency or move in from the outside the district. Seventy percent (70%) moved in from the outside, with 28 percent moving up from within. These data indicated that most superintendents (83%) moved for the "professional opportunity." It was interesting to note that the majority of the sample (43%) were *not* required by contract to move into the district. Thirty-five percent (35%) were required to move, with the remainder already living in the district. Of those who were not required to move, 56 percent did anyway.

Eighty-six percent (86%) of those who moved received moving expenses. Of those who did move, 25 percent moved within 100 miles, 24 percent moved between 100 and 249 miles, and the remaining 11 percent moved over 250 miles.

Forty-nine percent (49%) of the group had children of school age. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the children attended the school district in which their parent served as superintendent. Thirty-one percent (31%) attended another school district.

Per-pupil operating cost was measured by dividing the total budget by student enrollment. Per-pupil operating costs are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Per-Pupil Operating Costs

Expenditure per Pupil		% of Total
$6,000 - $8,000	=	44
$7,000 - $10,000	=	14
$10,000 +	=	19

Given the broad-based nature of the sample, reliable generalizations can be drawn from the basic demographic data.

PART II
CONTRACTUAL ISSUES

The superintendent of school's employment contract specifies the terms and conditions of employment along with salary and fringe benefits. Ranging from a simple statement to elaborate legal documents, the contract is intended to define clearly the conditions of employment, set forth the rights of both employer and chief executive officer of the district, and specify the compensation due in terms of salary, benefits, and reimbursable expenses. The contract is generally negotiated at the time of employment, and again each time the term is scheduled to expire. Issues of renewal of contracts and dismissal procedures are typically included in contracts.

The "Snapshot" survey addressed the term and renewal provisions of contracts, evaluation procedures, salary, transportation, medical examinations, leaves ranging from vacation to termination, tuition reimbursement, and professional expenses. Each is briefly reviewed in the paragraphs that follow, based upon a total usable return of four hundred eighty (480) responses.

With the exception of the district superintendency, employment contracts for the chief school officer are limited to a maximum of five years, with the most frequently cited options being three years (54%) or five years (31%). Nine percent (9%) of the respondents reported a four-year contract, 3 percent a two-year agreement, and only 2 percent reported a one-year employment contract. The rolling or evergreen contract, which provides for annual renewal to the full term of the contract, was found to exist in the contracts of 43 percent of the respondents. Nearly half the "evergreen" respondents reported an annual renewal, with the balance noting renewal during the last year of the agreement.

Evaluation of the superintendent was viewed as a valuable exercise by a significant majority (81%) of the respondents. In general, the evaluation was an annual, formal process, and part of an agreed-upon procedure, although the presence of specific contract language related to evaluation was not compiled. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the returns reported that the evaluation, at some time, appeared in written form. The distribution of earned salary, for the 1991-92 academic year, exclusive of any fringe benefits, is noted in Table 5.

Table 5 Superintendent Salaries 1991 - 1992	
$ Range	**Number of Responses**
40,000 - 50,000	1
51,000 - 60,000	38
61,000 - 70,000	113
71,000 - 80,000	103
81,000 - 90,000	75
91,000 - 100,000	51
101,000 - 110,000	53
111,000 - 120,000	29
120,000+	11

Compensation for professional travel ranged from the provision of a district vehicle (30%), to reimbursement for mileage (48%), to a lump sum payment (18%), with 10 percent reporting no compensation for travel.

An interest in the wellness of the superintendent was reflected in a 73 percent affirmative response to an inquiry regarding required medical examinations. Most contracts specified that superintendents could receive medical exams at district expense on an annual basis.

Provisions for leave identified by the "Snapshot" survey include vacation, illness, personal and termination. Nearly half the respondents receive twenty vacation days per year, between twelve and fifteen sick days, and two or three personal days. Eighty percent (80%) receive twenty five or fewer vacation days, although 10 percent report thirty days, and one response noted forty-five vacation days per year!

Termination leave was found to be offered in 19 percent of the cases reported. Table 6 on the following page summarizes the extent to which respondents' vacation days may accumulate.

Table 6 Accumulated Vacation Days	
Accumulation Range	**Number of Responses**
0-9	155
10-20	80
21-30	53
31-40	37
41-50	22
51 +	25
No limit	90

Other professional benefits include tuition reimbursement for graduate study for 22 percent of the superintendents, and the payment of professional membership dues and provision for attendance at the conferences of these professional organizations.

Regrettably, the survey data collected on insurance benefits were deemed to be invalid, and future instruments will be modified so as to allow for more accurate reporting of this critical area. Of specific interest will be any contractual association with the coverage provided other district employees through collective bargaining, and the provision of additional life or disability insurance as compensation in addition to, or in lieu of, salary.

PART III
RETIREMENT

The third section of the 1992 NYSCOSS membership survey contained items on retirement. Usable data were found for six of the seven items on retirement. Results will be reported here.

When superintendents were asked to indicate which "Tier" of the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) they belonged to, 76 percent noted Tier I membership. Percentages dropped off dramatically for membership in other TRS Tiers, with 9 percent in Tier II; 7 percent in Tier III; and 5 percent in Tier IV.

Tier I and Tier II TRS members are eligible to retire at age 55. Thus, given the 49.7 year mean age of the superintendents in our sample, and the fact that 85 percent are Tier I or Tier II members, 56 percent of the respondents indicated plans to retire by the year 2000, with 22 percent expected to do so by 1995. With these returns generalized to all of New York State, 426 sitting superintendents plan to retire by the year 2000. Another 29 percent of current superintendents anticipated retirement by the year 2005. These numbers are formidable and present challenges for filling the leadership "vacuum" created by retiring superintendents over the next decade.

In answering the question "What do you plan to do within the next five years?," 65 percent of the chief school officers expressed plans to continue as superintendent. Nine percent (9%) described themselves as changing positions within the profession while 11 percent cited plans to "leave the profession." Another 7 percent of the sample characterized plans as "uncertain."

Superintendents were requested to rate factors that would influence the decision "if" they were to leave their current position. The five most frequently mentioned reasons having the most influence on a decision to leave were:

1. Retirement
2. I want a different lifestyle.
3. Greater salary potential in another district.

4. Family wants a different lifestyle.
5. Superintendent/Board conflict.

Twelve other possible factors were listed in the survey, but they were not rated as highly as those above.

Two items rounded out this section of the survey. Perhaps predictably, a stunning 94 percent of the superintendents felt their current superintendency was a successful one! As a rough gauge of satisfaction, chief school officers were invited to choose another career if they were able to start anew. Results showed that nearly two out of three would again enter the broad field of education, with 44 percent selecting the superintendency and lesser numbers choosing central administration, the principalship, teaching, or college instruction. Twenty percent (20%) of the superintendents would elect to start a career outside education or in some other field. For this item, 15 percent of the sample did not respond or give usable answers.

The information reported in this section of the study has important implications for NYSCOSS in terms of recruiting and training future superintendents and encouraging professional development for practicing superintendents. By addressing these areas, the Council will help to promote quality candidates for the superintendency.

PART IV
PERCEPTIONS ON EDUCATION ISSUES

The final section of the 1992 NYSCOSS membership survey concentrated on superintendents' perceptions of a variety of school board attributes, leadership responsibilities, and educational issues. Usable results from the "issue" items will be highlighted in narrative form and certain graphs will be used to illuminate the narrative.

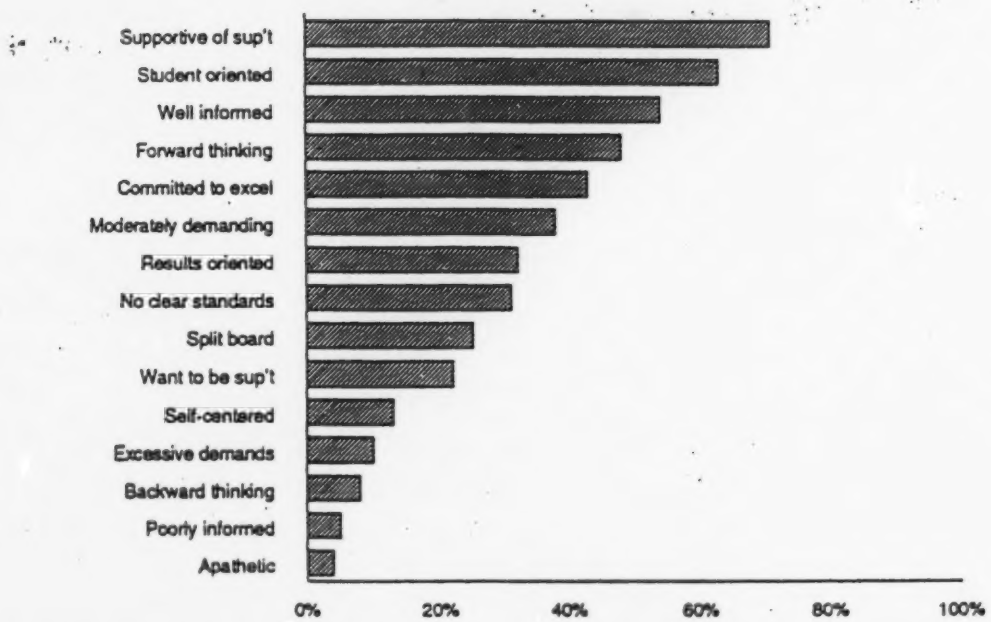
Superintendents were asked to "characterize" their Board of Education by checking on the survey all descriptors that applied to their Board. Fifteen descriptors were listed. Most respondents identified more than one descriptor. Therefore, in describing the results, the percentage of superintendents that checked a given descriptor will be reported.

The top five attributes of Boards, as identified by the superintendents, were all positive. Seventy-one percent (71%) characterized their Board as SUPPORTIVE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, 63 percent viewed their Board as STUDENT-ORIENTED, WELL-INFORMED was noted by 54 percent, 48 percent perceived their Board as FORWARD THINKING, while another 43 percent called their Board COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE.

The least mentioned attributes attached to school boards were rather negative. Superintendents checked the following items: SELF-CENTERED (13%), EXCESSIVELY DEMANDING (10%), BACKWARD THINKING (8%), POORLY INFORMED (5%), and APATHETIC (4%). Given that the most mentioned Board qualities were quite positive, and the least mentioned attributes were very negative, there is likely some influence of "social desirability" in the superintendents' responses on this particular item. That is, to characterize their Board's attributes in positive terms reflects positively on the chiefs, and vice versa.

Five school board attributes fell into a middle range, with percentages between 38 and 22 percent. They included MODERATELY DEMANDING, RESULTS ORIENTED, WITHOUT CLEAR STANDARDS, SPLIT BOARD, and WANTING TO BE SUPERINTENDENT. Results for this item are noted on Graph 1 on the following page.

Graph 1 Superintendents' Perceptions of School Boards' Attributes



As the chief executive officer of the school district, superintendents have responsibilities for a wide array of educational activities. They were asked to rank different responsibilities "according to the actual and ideal amount of time required." In analyzing responses, we decided to compare responsibilities, both actual and ideal, by establishing the percentage of superintendents that rated each responsibility with a factor of one ("most time"). By doing so, it would be apparent which responsibilities ranked high and low in the superintendents' judgment.

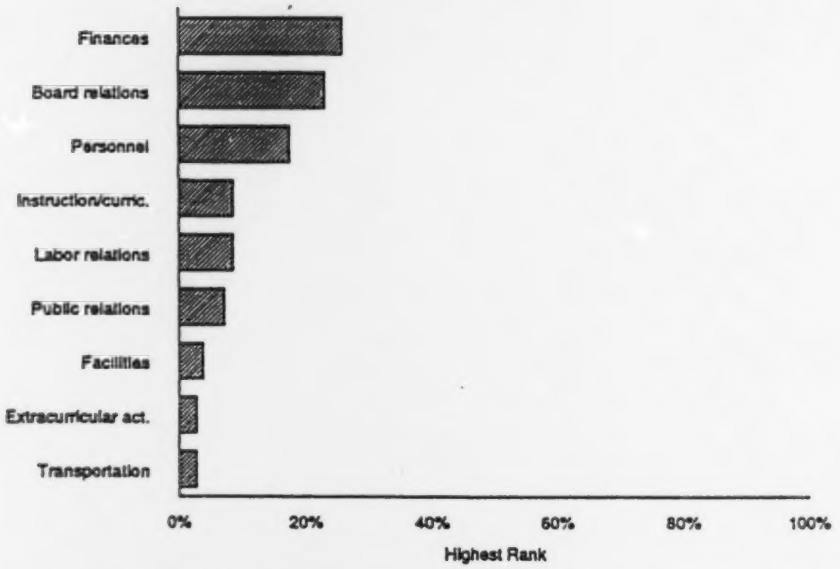
In an "ideal" professional workplace, nearly half of the superintendents (48%) expressed a desire to concentrate on issues associated with INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM. Because teaching and student curricular initiatives are at the "heart" of the educational enterprise, it is refreshing to learn how chief school officers would "like" to spend their time. The "actual" amount of time reported spent on INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM, however, was sharply different according to the superintendents. Only nine percent gave INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM a ranking of "one" in terms of "actual" time spent. Interestingly, and to an extent predictably, superintendents listed FINANCE (26%), BOARD RELATIONS (23%), and PERSONNEL (15%) as the three areas of responsibility requiring the most "actual" time. In another discrepant result, a mere six percent gave FINANCE a "one" ranking in the "ideal" amount of time required.

Graphs 2, 3 and 4 chart superintendents' responses to responsibilities according to the actual and ideal amount of time required.

Graph 2

Superintendents' Responsibilities

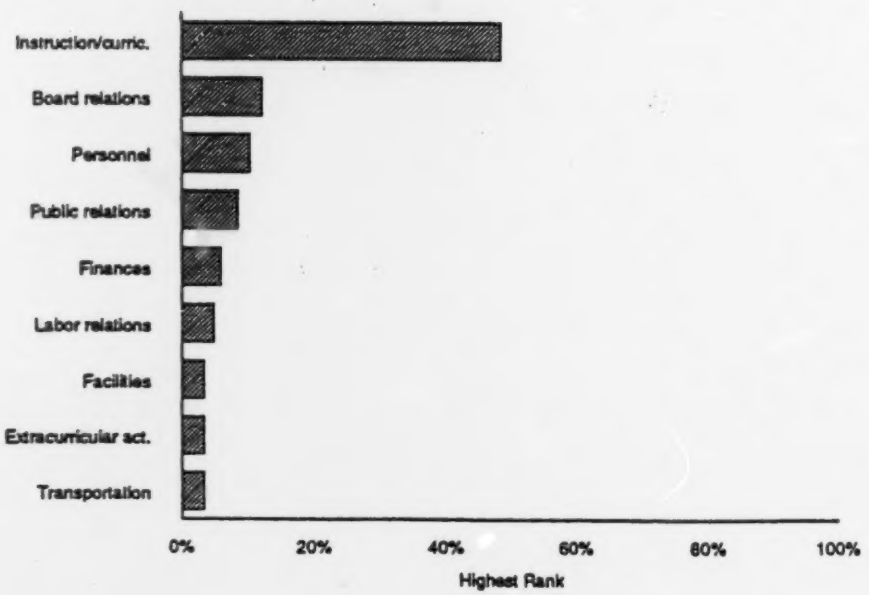
Actual Time Required



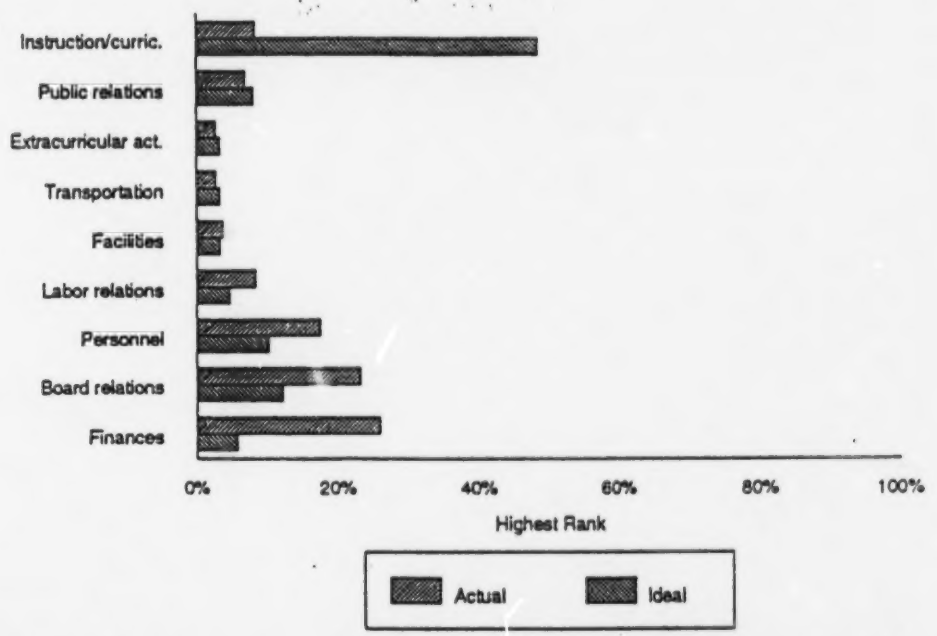
Graph 3

Superintendents' Responsibilities

Ideal Time Required



Graph 4 Superintendents' Responsibilities
Actual Compared to Ideal Time Required

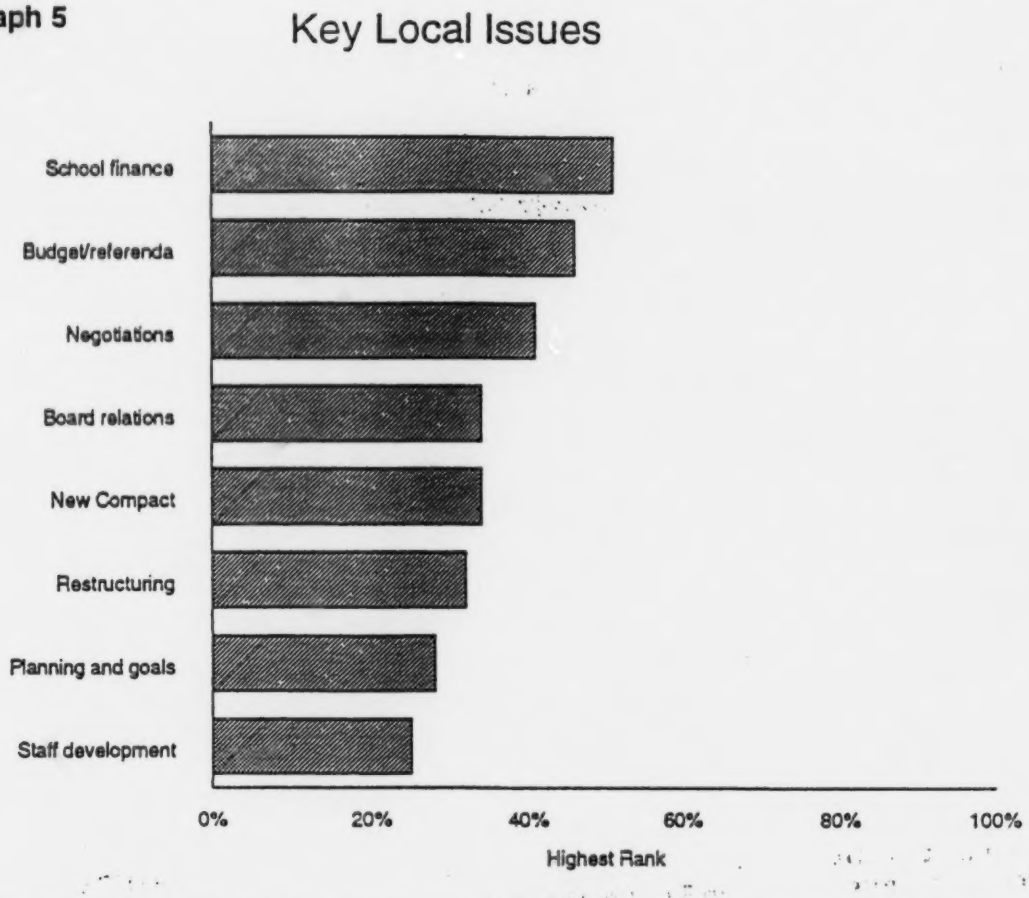


Another item in the "issues" section of the NYSCOSS membership survey called on superintendents to "select five *key* local issues and five *key* state level issues" that which they deal currently. Twenty-nine (29) different educational issues were listed, and respondents also had the option of identifying some "other" local or state issue not appearing on the list. In reporting results for this question, the top five local and top five state issues were those checked off by the highest percentage of school superintendents.

On the "local" front, chief school officers selected key issues that they found themselves handling in their own school districts. Heading the list of local issues was **FINANCING OF SCHOOLS** which showed up on 51 percent of the surveys. Closely associated with finance, **PASSING BUDGETS/BONDS/REFERENDA** was the second most frequently cited local issue, with 46 percent. **NEGOTIATIONS** was third, with 41 percent of the superintendents identifying collective bargaining as a key local issue. Tied for fourth, noted by 34 percent, were **ADMINISTRATIVE/BOARD RELATIONS** and **COMPACT FOR LEARNING.** Since a significant number of respondents selected three additional local issues, we will report them here. **RESTRUCTURING/RENEWAL** was found on 32 percent of the surveys, **PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING** was mentioned on 28 percent of the returns, and **PROFESSIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT** was specified on 25 percent.

Graph 5 charts these findings. Clearly there is some overlap in these issue areas, for planning is a component of restructuring schools just as professional staff development, a cardinal feature of *A New Compact for Learning*, requires financial support.

Graph 5

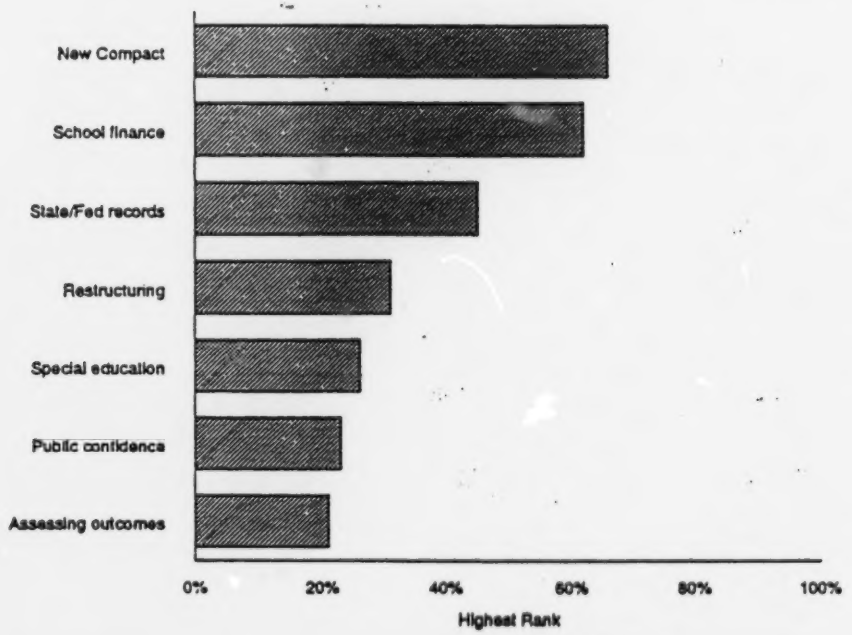


State level issues selected by superintendents revealed some similarities and differences from the list of local issues. The Commissioner's *New Compact for Learning* placed first on the list of state issues, with 66 percent of the superintendents noting it. **FINANCING OF SCHOOLS** gained the second position by being listed on 62 percent of the surveys. **COMPLIANCE WITH STATE/FEDERAL RECORD KEEPING REQUIREMENTS**, an item not high up on the list of local issues, was found on 45 percent of the returns. Thirty-one percent (31%) viewed **RESTRUCTURING/RENEWAL** as a major state issue, nearly the same number who put restructuring on the local list. **SPECIAL EDUCATION** appeared on 26 percent of the surveys, putting it fifth on the list of state issues.

Two further items deserve mention. Superintendents reported PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN EDUCATION and ASSESSING EDUCATION OUTCOMES on 23 percent and 21 percent of the questionnaires respectively. These issues, therefore, emerge as significant state level concerns. Graph 6 summarizes these results.

Graph 6

Key State Issues



At the extreme low end of local or state issues selected by superintendents were AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, USE OF DRUGS/ALCOHOL IN SCHOOLS, and STUDENT HEALTH CONCERNS. Less than 3 percent of chief school officers noted these issues as "key" on either the local or state level.

The final question on the "issues" section of the survey asked superintendents how they felt about a number of components of the state's reform agenda, concepts such as site-based management, shared decision making, parent involvement, and a half-dozen other ideas. The questionnaire sought results expressed in positive and negative rankings. Usable data, however, were obtained only by recording respondents' positive ratings, or a score of one (1). Consequently, in describing results here, we will rank the reform agenda concepts based exclusively on the percentage of superintendents' positive ratings.

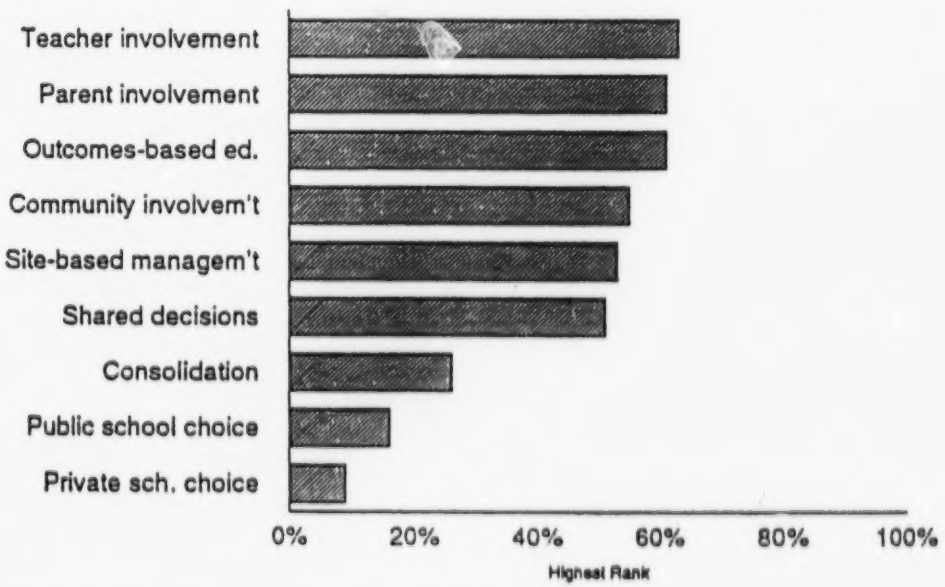
The three highest rated reform agenda concepts, endorsed by over 60 percent of the superintendents, were TEACHER INVOLVEMENT, PARENT INVOLVEMENT, and OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION. Over 50 percent of the respondents' rated three additional ideas as positive: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT,

and SHARED DECISION MAKING. In light of the widespread identification of *A New Compact for Learning* as a key state issue, the support given to these aspects of the reform package reinforces the primacy of the *New Compact* as a blueprint for improving education in New York State.

Three reform concepts received fewer positive ratings from the superintendents. For example, CONSOLIDATION, the merging of one school district with another, was given a positive rating by 26 percent. PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, and PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE, ideas given national visibility in recent years, were rated favorably by only 16 percent and 9 percent of the chief school officers respectively. Certainly it is not shocking for public school officers to show little enthusiasm for private school choice. These results can be found in Graph 7.

Graph 7 Educational Reform Issues

Positive Feelings



SUMMARY

For a first venture by the NYSCOSS Membership Committee, we self-servingly view the *1992 Snapshot of the Superintendency Survey* as a success. Why? An impressive 63 percent of those surveyed took the time and energy to complete a questionnaire that furnished solid information from practicing superintendents. Data from the survey are presently "banked" in a computer thanks to the administrators and staff of the Madison-Oneida BOCES. While the survey fell short of perfection, the Membership Committee intends to revise and improve the survey instrument. When complete, new data will be added to the bank by administering the membership survey every three years. Such data are intended primarily for the information, benefit, and use of school superintendents in New York State. By conducting a survey of members every three years, longitudinal and comparative study of the superintendency in New York State becomes possible.

Permit us to close by making a few general observations based on the Snapshot Survey. First, it is clear that a significant number (56%) of our superintendent colleagues intend to retire by the year 2000. As reported earlier, when generalizing results, some 426 sitting superintendents are likely to retire in the next seven years. Since comparable numbers will likely vacate the principalship over these same years, there exists a potential "leadership vacuum" in the administrative ranks. How we respond, through mentoring, training, and encouraging talented young educators, may help to address future leadership needs. In preparing others for the challenges of the superintendency, it is equally plain that we need to promote equity actively to assure greater diversity in the superintendency, for right now, school superintendents are overwhelmingly white men. Women and minority educators will likely furnish quality leadership in increasing numbers in the years ahead.

Data in the survey suggest that despite our "tales of woe,"superintendents are generally a satisfied bunch. Evidence for this conclusion rests on the positive relationships, overall, with boards of education. Boards were characterized in fundamentally favorable terms such as supportive, student-oriented, and forward thinking. A "buoyant" perception of the superintendency can be found in the number of colleagues who, given the opportunity, would choose an education career again.

Finally, we find ourselves enmeshed in financial matters that are unique locally and in part precipitated by state and national fiscal affairs. Yet, ideally, superintendents yearn to be close to the real-life curricular issues that influence student learning. In other words, we remain true to our roots in seeking to improve educational opportunities for children.

Superintendents are in the forefront of leading change in New York State. The "Issues" section of the report underscores the depth and breadth of superintendents' involvement in reforming learning, teaching, and the structure of public education. To do so certainly requires a dynamic process that embraces the ideas of students, teachers, parents, community representatives, administrators, and school board members. Information abounds as to why such change needs to be encouraged. How the reform is successfully led and achieved raises new, and some old,challenges for each and every chief school officer. While no such goal is easily reached, happily, it appears we are up to the task!